

Workforce Observations

For The North Central WDA

March, 2002



February Unemployment Rates Jumps From January Levels

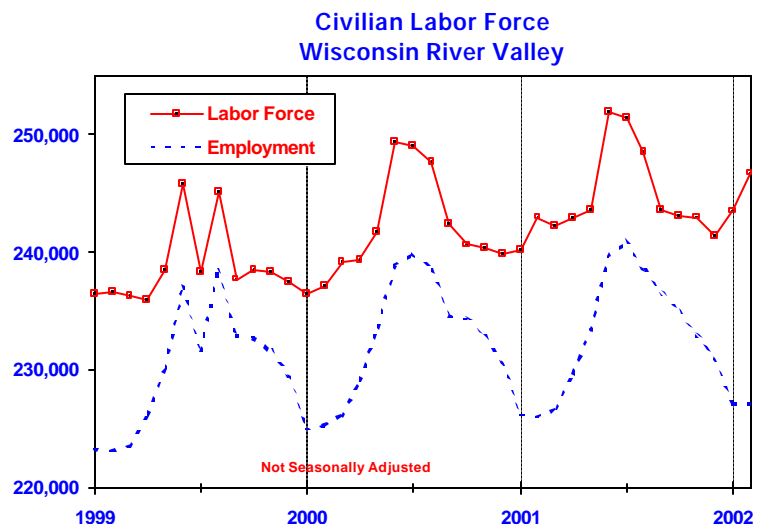
The month of February is in many ways the deepest month of the winter, more winter-like even than January. It is not unusual to have our coldest weather in this early month, or our worst storms. Strangely, it is also often the month when the first hints of the coming spring will appear as uncharacteristic warm spells amid the deep cold of a long winter. Residents of the northern part of the state have long learned to see these false springs for what they are – brief hints of a warmer season that is still well around the corner and out of sight for a while yet.

The seasonal employment characteristics typical of the colder months are well in place. We expect to see employment at one of the lowest levels of the year. When we look at the actual number of people working in the counties of the Upper Wisconsin River District, it is not too much of a surprise that there has been a decrease from the previous month. However, when compared to the same period of 12 months ago, there has been an increase of jobs in every county. This accounts for about 5,000 jobs throughout the nine county area, with some counties gaining as little as a handful (statistically unimportant) to several hundred.

This can only be good news. But if that is the case, why have the unemployment rates of the River Valley counties bumped upwards? In fact, the February rates are inching towards the ten-percent mark, a level not seen in our area in a good long time. Langlade County, for instance, has topped this mark by about five tenths of a percentage point. How can this be, if we seem to be experiencing a modest, but definite, recovery from the recent slump? The answer, as usual, is that the number of people in the labor force has also gone up a bit in the most recent month. When this number increases at a rate greater than the number of people working, the unemployment rate is going to increase. This means that the most significant number in the monthly statistics is often the number of people at work rather than the unemploy-

ment rate, which is strictly relative. The unemployment rate is the donut hole. Compared to the previous month (January) the number working was almost the same, with only modest decreases in most River Valley counties. When seen against February 2001, there were increases in every county. This is the donut.

News of an economic recovery from the recent slump nation- and region-wide is certainly encouraging. If true, it will mean a belated increase in employment levels by late spring or early summer, at least. This is the pattern that we experience in the labor markets of Wisconsin following changes on the national level (either good or bad) – we tend to be about one quarter



or more behind everyone else. The most that can be said of the recent news out of the labor markets of the state is that it is a mixed picture, with seasonal factors still well in place. These factors seem to account for more than the wider economic influences on our local situation right now.

Around The Valley -

As mentioned, something is happening in the Wisconsin River Valley and elsewhere in the state that has not been seen for some time—rates of unemployment creeping upward into the double digit range, at least in a few counties. Langlade County crossed the 10 percent threshold in February, with Lincoln, Forest, and Vilas Counties close behind. Even the Core Counties of Portage, Wood, and Marathon

showed higher rates then they have in years. Job levels remain strong everywhere, however. The current midwinter slump may be only seasonal, or may be directly related to the sagging national picture, but we are still better off than some parts of the state. A late season rally in the weather may yet mean some winter profit for a somewhat beleaguered tourist industry in the north, but as willing as the winter tourists

are to head north at the first sign of agreeable weather, it is a fact that the end is in sight for skying and snow mobiling. Most trails are now closed for the season and, except for a few places, the ice on area lakes has been declared off limits. There is little to do now but take a deep breath and await the coming summer.

Build Wisconsin is an initiative that, for the first time, will bring together all players in the Wisconsin economy. Please visit this site for more information—

http://www.wisgov.state.wi.us/build_wis.asp



BUILD WISCONSIN

For The Mo. Of February 2002	Adams	Forest	Lang.	Lincoln	Mara.	Oneida	Portage	Vilas	Wood	Region
Labor Force	7,910	4,881	9,453	14,929	76,484	20,462	36,869	11,329	41,895	224,212
Employed	7,362	4,500	8,572	13,761	72,283	18,955	34,614	10,427	38,921	209,395
Unemployed	548	381	881	1,168	4,201	1,507	2,255	902	2,974	14,817
Unemployment rate(%)	6.9	7.8	9.3	7.8	5.5	7.4	6.1	8.0	7.1	6.6%
Total, all industries**	3,740	3,297	7,643	11,980	69,170	17,209	32,131	7,606	44,308	197,084
Construction & Mining	119	45	210	386	2,265	922	748	697	1,213	6,605
Manufacturing	404	479	1,648	3,872	17,659	2,062	5,634	427	9,516	41,701
Transportation & Util.	186	235	417	454	4,184	663	1,954	178	3,261	11,532
Wholesale Trade	110	40	355	385	5,116	536	1,480	242	1,419	9,683
Retail Trade	768	463	1,680	2,153	13,295	4,541	6,030	2,109	8,098	39,137
FIRE	93	95	258	724	4,711	437	3,704	297	950	11,269
Services	858	417	1,865	1,877	13,973	5,246	6,881	1,540	14,331	46,988
Government	1,202	1,523	1,210	2,129	7,967	2,802	5,700	2,116	5,520	30,169
Change from previous mo.	Adams	Forest	Lang.	Lincoln	Mara.	Oneida	Portage	Vilas	Wood	Region
Civilian Labor Force*	-63	-70	-141	-161	-737	-89	-1,299	-17	-574	-3,151
Employed	18	20	-10	88	187	220	-936	121	134	-158
Unemployed	-81	-90	-131	-249	-924	-309	-363	-138	-708	-2,993
Unemployment rate(%)	-1.0	-1.7	-1.2	-1.6	-1.1	-1.4	-0.8	-1.2	-1.6	0.1
Total, all industries**	0	24	24	-34	28	-76	948	-87	3	830
Construction & Mining	0	-19	-19	12	-121	-18	-9	-35	-49	-258
Manufacturing	-11	-19	-19	-10	-20	-27	69	-4	-82	-123
Transportation & Util.	-2	-1	-1	-7	17	-6	18	0	43	61
Wholesale Trade	-1	4	4	0	-31	8	-2	-3	7	-14
Retail Trade	0	-6	-6	-39	65	-90	-4	-63	-52	-195
FIRE	1	6	6	-11	16	-2	-7	2	-15	-4
Services	-2	30	30	-7	-107	-36	93	-49	34	-14
Government	15	29	29	28	209	95	790	65	117	1,377
Change from year ago	Adams	Forest	Lang.	Lincoln	Mara.	Oneida	Portage	Vilas	Wood	Region
Civilian Labor Force*	-99	401	-146	-199	96	305	-675	167	411	261
Employed	-114	413	-144	-113	385	362	-813	200	652	828
Unemployed	15	-12	-2	-86	-289	-57	138	-33	-241	-567
Unemployment rate(%)	0.2	-1.0	0.1	-0.5	-0.4	-0.4	0.5	-0.4	-0.6	0.1
Total, all industries**	-58	289	-179	-241	-627	150	271	147	708	460
Construction & Mining	8	-5	-125	-144	-672	55	-183	-92	-291	-1,449
Manufacturing	-29	-42	-132	-426	-1,690	-30	-197	-64	-440	-3,050
Transportation & Util.	20	16	29	5	333	-16	164	-25	121	647
Wholesale Trade	16	-1	-123	-20	16	183	-166	106	58	69
Retail Trade	-27	39	-147	-154	1,067	-138	19	241	216	1,116
FIRE	-3	4	13	470	-169	-5	23	-11	53	375
Services	-51	-30	349	62	270	-75	91	-89	871	1,398
Government	8	308	-43	-34	218	176	520	81	120	1,354

* Includes participants residing in area. ** Includes employment with employers located in area. Estimates are NOT seasonally adjusted. Current month estimates are preliminary. Totals may not add due to rounding. Calculations based on unrounded numbers.

Look for the most current Labor Market Information at: WWW.DWD.STATE.WI.US/LMI
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